

Poland – cultural bridge between East and West Europe

Aus der politischen und geist Geschichte Dresdens nicht
wegzudenken sind die polnischen Emigranten,
denen vor allem aus dem Bildungsbürgertum eine welle
wärmster Sympathie entgegenschlug. Eine starke polnische Kolonie
war in den Residenz bereits seit den Tagen der sächsisch-polnischen Union ansässig.¹

Contact between people of different cultures inevitably leads to incomprehension, creation of stereotypes – it is a natural phenomenon that can find validation in many contexts. Studies on Polish-German relations often approach the issue from a historical perspective with the Teutonic Order (one of the earliest cited German-Polish conflicts, the massacre of German knights at Grunwald; 1410 at the Schlacht von Grunwald, Germanic knights were beaten by subjects of the united Polish-Lithuanian-Byelorussian kingdom) or World War Two as a starting point.

The term “cultural exchange projects” is ambiguous enough to warrant an explanation. “Culture” is an umbrella term that I have interpreted to contain history, social involvement and interface between people. An important question arising in my study was the time frame. I am concerned about history in as much as it affects the current relationship between Germans and Poles so I won’t focus on one special part of history but I’ll try to summary the most important conflicts and reconciliation. Cultural distance reflects also a difference in inner values among countries that should be assessed at the cultural or country level. Psychic distance is based on the individual’s perception and should be assessed at the individual level. One of the most interesting theses of that study is the polish self-assessment. When Poland looks to its neighbors, it looks primarily east, to Russia, and west, to Germany. Poland has a long history of understanding itself through contrast to these two countries, these two ethnicities. Poland remains outside the border of the European community (in the sense, wealthy, modern, civilized, even if it shared a history with neighbouring nation), it didn’t feel

¹ *Dresden. Die Geschichte der Stadt. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, pod red. Dresdner Geschichtsverein, Dresden 2002, p. 144: „You cannot imagine the political and cultural history of Dresden without the Polish emigration, which, above all, on the part of members of the intelligentsia wave burst huge crush. Strong, polish colony appeared in Dresden mansion already at the time of Saxon-Polish Union ”.

like part of that society. Always being poorer and “worst” than west countries, it aspired to and achieved membership of the European Union. Historically, Germany has often occupied a position of political and/or economic dominance over its eastern neighbor. However it was always Poland who gave them the first idea of Slavic language or culture. It doesn’t matter how many conflicts were between them – there was always an German interest (not only “Drang nach Osten”) in East Europe; and the first place to that knowledge was Poland.

Without a doubt, the influence in history is enormous. The German–Polish border region was always a zone of contact between two very different political traditions and cultures that often have confronted each other in conflict. Germany (or to be more precise, I’ve to say Saxony) has always attracted immigrants from Eastern Europe². Saxony was the place where Polish emigrants were able to find shelter and continue to fight for the freedom of the motherland. The relationship between Poland and Saxony has been visible for centuries, despite the fact that both of them belong to different systems. Already in the 15th century, the Odra seemed to be very important boundary, dividing Europe into two parts with different cultural codes, jurisdictions, or even with a diverse art and architecture³. However, everything changed when Augustus II appeared, who began to introduce new (common) elements of both Polish and Saxon culture (the Saxon-Polish Union). To both courts he took an Italian theatre, opera and made changes in the internal design of the Royal Castle and the overall architecture. Extended library resources and galleries were opened for all residents⁴. In Poland the German language was introduced to Jesuit schools, which proved to be very useful. As in the following years, Augustus allowed the sons of the nobility to study in schools of chivalry⁵. In the 17th century Saxon miners have helped extracting salt in Wieliczka’s salt mine (which was almost depleted). But thanks to their extremely efficient work under the command of Johann Gottlieb Borlach and special techniques, extraction of this resource is possible up to the present day⁶. The Saxon-Polish Union is one of the most controversial topics about Polish-German relationship (there is a lot of opposite reviews for positive or negative impact on Union policy for both nations).

² In 1980 lived in Germany 177 000 Pole, in 1990 only 765 000. A. Zając, *Sytuacja Polaków w Niemczech*, Warszawa 2001, p. 12-14.

³ J. Staszewski, *Brücken zwischen Polen und Sachsen während der Union beider Länder*, w: U. Zwinger, *Europäische Herausforderungen heute*, Jena 1994, p. 103.

⁴ J. Staszewski, *Brücken zwischen Polen und Sachsen während der Union beider Länder*, w: U. Zwinger, *Europäische Herausforderungen heute*, Jena 1994, p. 108.

⁵ J. Staszewski, *Brücken zwischen Polen und Sachsen während der Union beider Länder*, w: U. Zwinger, *Europäische Herausforderungen heute*, Jena 1994, p. 110.

⁶ J. Staszewski, *Brücken zwischen Polen und Sachsen während der Union beider Länder*, w: U. Zwinger, *Europäische Herausforderungen heute*, Jena 1994, p. 108.

Another important tie between both peoples was visible in the nineteenth century. After 1830 in the Saxon society increased note of sympathy for the Polish emigrants (which have to leave country after the downfall the November rising), which is the so-called “great emigration”⁷, the refugees from the uprisings, who had hoped to receive assistance from a resident of Dresden, compatriots and the Saxons. In 1831 the Saxon people joined the Polish insurgents, as long as it did not contribute to the creation of an awkward situation for the Saxon government. However, in fear of repression of the part of Russia, Prussia and Austria, Saxon government tried to avoid helping the Polish insurgents. In 12. 04. 1831 the weapons shipments to Poland were forbidden, also travelling through Saxony required a special visa⁸. Therefore, the principle of issuing a permit to stay only for a few weeks was introduced for the first time. Moreover, in Saxony there were also individual personalities that were attentive to Polish immigrants, for example baron Carl Eduard von Fink, Richard Otto Spazier or Eduard Burkhardt. In 1834, von Fink hooked up with his estate located on the North of Dresden numerous expatriates, and provided them with an opportunity to continue their journey⁹. In March 1832, the policy targets of Polish refugees, as a result of the pressure of Russia, Prussia and Austria, got even sharpened. Later on, the Saxon Government fearing victimisation decided to permit of residence in Saxony only for a short period. The emigrants, if possible, should have to avoid travel through Dresden. At the end of November 1832, only 27 expatriates lived in Dresden, for example Lubomirski, Sapieha and Szymanowski. After 1848 there were still severe rules, but they were not strictly adhered by the Saxon Government, although other powers continued to require control of Polish emigrants. And yet there had been cases of illegal crossing of the border of Saxony by the Poles. However, after the events of the years of 1846 and 1848/1849 (February revolution in France, March events) attitudes to the Polish revolutionaries cooled down. Although the German Democrats and the founders of communism continued to stand behind the support for liberation ambitions of Poles:

Die Befreiung Deutschlands kann also nicht zustande kommen, ohne dass die Befreiung
Polens von der Unterdrückung durch Deutsche zustande kommt. Und darum hat Polen und

⁷ L. Gadon, *Przejście Polaków przez Niemcy po upadku powstania listopadowego*, Poznań 1889; A. Gerecke, *Das polnische Echo auf die polnische Erhebung von 1830*, Wiesbaden 1964; H. Kocój, *Niemcy a powstanie listopadowe. Sprawa powstania listopadowego w niemieckiej opinii publicznej i w polityce pruskiej 1830-1831. Zagadnienia wybrane*, Warszawa 1970, S. Kalemka, *Wielka emigracja. Polskie wychodźstwo polityczne w latach 1831-1864*, Warszawa 1971 i S. Kalemka, *Die polnische „Große Emigration“ im 19. Jahrhundert. Zu ihrer Geschichte, ihrer Ideologie und ihren kulturellen Leistungen*, „Jahrbuch für Geschichte der sozialistischen Länder Europas“ 1987, nr 22/2, p. 29-42.

⁸ Staatsarchiv Leipzig, Ältere Amtshauptmannschaften, nr 1424, Polnische Flüchtlinge 1831-1836, p. 1-20.

⁹ Staatsarchiv Leipzig, Ältere Amtshauptmannschaften, nr 1424, Polnische Flüchtlinge 1831-1836, p.. 49.

Deutschland ein gemeinschaftliches Interesse, und darum können polnische und deutsche Demokraten gemeinsam arbeiten an der Befreiung beider Nationen¹⁰.

and Karl Marx believed that the Polish struggle for independence would begin a new era of the revolution in Europe. After 1863, a large group of immigrants came again to Saxony, especially to Dresden. However, Saxon society was not so friendly anymore to Polish refugees like thirty years ago. During this period, the eastern part of today's Germany became a "second home" for many Polish immigrants, Gustav Olizar organised the so-called "scientific congresses" – meetings, in which many famous personalities participated, who were fellows travelling from East to West, for example Edward Rastawiecki, Przewdziecki.

Later on, Slavic culture and literature started to be popular in Germany. The first signs of interest in Polish literature appeared at the end of the 18th century, when in 1793 J. J. Kausch released the first monograph of Polish literature, *Geschichte der polnischen Literatur*. For German Ritz so early interest in the area of Slavic culture in such adverse circumstances, they were two partitions of Polish, is quite remarkable and almost inexplicable¹¹. However, this work was the exception, followed by a long pause in the interest of German researchers in Slavic literature. After the end of the war, German-Slavic literatures have continued to grow, however, have not reached already such results as hundred years before. There was at that time almost no major work of German researchers, this time focused on translating the available position dedicated to the history of literature. Unfortunately this is not always an outstanding work, but rather the political aspects of the texts¹². After the war, German studies focused primarily on the literature of the 20th century. Old Polish literature and romanticism were still taken into account only by a few scholars, while the articles devoted to Baroque and Renaissance (despite the fact that they were written) were never published.

Going back to history, the situation of Polish immigrants changed in the end of the 21st century, when they began to see in this developing country, "the ability to improve their own existence". In the early 1980s, many Polish immigrants settled in the West, especially in Germany. Then, Polish centres of cultural life began to appear in cities like Munich and Köln. A bit later Polish literature succeeded. Many of Polish expatriates-writers, especially after 1989, were trying to get attention of the German readers and editorial houses. To the new

¹⁰ „The German liberation cannot be completed without the Polish independence. Therefore, Poland and Germany have common interests, therefore, Polish and German Democrats can work together on the unleashing of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth”. G. Schmidt, *Sachsen und die polnischen Emigranten 1831-1864*, in: „Jahrbuch für Geschichte der sozialistischen Länder Europas“ 1978, nr 22/2, p. 43.

¹¹ H. Kneip, *Einleitung*, in: *Die Rezeption der polnischen Literatur im deutschsprachigen Raum und die der deutschsprachigen in Polen 1945-1985*, H. Kneip a. Huberta Orłowskiego, Darmstadt 1988, p. 179

¹² H. Kneip, *Einleitung*, in: *Die Rezeption der polnischen Literatur im deutschsprachigen Raum und die der deutschsprachigen in Polen 1945-1985*, H. Kneip a. Huberta Orłowskiego, Darmstadt 1988, p. 180

generation of Polish writers struggling with German language belongs Maria Kolenda (Der zwite Sommer, 2000), Magdalena Felixa (Die Fremde), Krzysztof Mik (Lullaby for dormant 1998) or Krzysztof Maria Załuski (Hospital Polonia 1998). "Mutual exchange" towards mutual benefit was of the humanistic dimension of Goethe. In his opinion the role of writers should contribute to the understanding between nations.

And what is happening today? Many Polish people are living and working, but that's not all. Dresden tries to promote Polish culture in Germany. There are various cultural events, such as meetings. An example here might be a visit to Mariusz Grzebalskiego (Salt Lake City Circle of Knowledge)¹³ in LeseGarten (05. 07. 2012), where he presented poems from his latest book *Grfitti*. This event took place within the framework of the Sommerfest des Literaturforums¹⁴

In 1992 was founded in Dresden, the German-Polish Association of Saxony, whose members chose as a goal to improve the existing relations and the history of the Polish-Saxon culture through various types of activities, advancing Polish integration with the European Union and to promote the building of the bridge of the agreement between the two Nations. The meeting place was designated at the Kraszewski Museum. This small museum, a little point on the map of Europe, is really unique. Nordstraße 28, Dresden is one of the obligatory places to which every Pole visitors should go. And it is one of the mandatory addresses, which can be found in any guide to the Saxon capital. It is located in a quiet street in the District of Neustadt, around four kilometres from the most important sightseeing in Dresden, the restored Frauenkirche, Zwinger or Taschenbergpalais, property of the Countess of Cosel. This place hosts not only the museum but also the Deutsch-Polnische Gesellschaft Sachsen and the Polish Association of Dresden. "Polonia-Dresden" is the Union of Polish people leaving in Dresden or the nearby villages surrounding the capital of Saxony. One of the main goals of the association is to help Polish immigrants adapt to their new reality, by knowing the history and cultural customs of the new country. However, the ultimate goal of "Polonia" is to promote Polish culture, language and history among both, the German society, and the new generation of Poles born already in Germany. An important point is also teaching the language (especially) to children born in Polish-German families. The President of the Polish Association Dresden is, since 1999, the Economist from Jelenia Góra, Catherine Knippschild. The Museum is a small Victorian villa, which in modern times has retained its 19th-century

¹³ N. N., *Literarische Alphabete*, www.literaturforum-dresden.de [3.07.2012].

¹⁴ B. Matuschewski, *Grafitti und Rechenschiebetafeln*, www.dresden-actuell.de/Veranstaltungen/267/Grafitti+und+Rechenschiebetafeln/Veranstaltung [03.07.2012].

character¹⁵. Kraszewski's Villa is like a small island full of memories of the fate of Polish emigrants, it is like a bridge connecting geographically close, and yet so culturally different nations; and of course, the Museum, which is "step forward" in decision now immediately after the end of World War II attempt to repair German-Polish relations. Villa of Kraszewski became actually a culture, to promote Polish culture and customs outside the country. The program was expanded to include concerts and literary exhibitions.

There is no doubt that the cultural dialogue, carried on over the years between Germany and Poland, has opened channels of cooperation which otherwise might have remained closed. Without this cultural exchange, political dialogue and economic cooperation would be even more cumbersome than it already is. Without this shared cultural heritage, the road to an integrated Europe would be even more difficult to traverse.

¹⁵ M. Gretzschel, *Stille Winkel in Dresden*, Hamburg 2008, p. 75.